

Honors Students:

Finding Lessons In All the Right Places

BY JO ANN LLOYD

From tutoring students in local elementary schools to helping develop their own curriculum, Cal Poly honors students contribute to the community in which they live and enrich their own academic experience at the same time.

As part of the Kennedy Library's new Learning Commons program, and with such recent changes to the Honors Program as new courses, leadership opportunities and campus relationships, "we are working to expand students' opportunities for interdisciplinary interaction," says program director Erika Rogers. "We have about 235 students from majors across the campus, and we hope to grow both in numbers and in activities over the next few years."

On campus, freshmen honors students may live together in the Honors House residence hall, an environment that fosters academic success and personal relationships. "I love the Honors House," says resident advisor Lynn Kendrick. "It's cool seeing these creative minds at work."

In the classroom, honors students are challenged by small class sizes in courses ranging from the politics of poverty and philosophical classics to calculus and physics.

Off campus, honors students assist elementary school children with their homework in an after-school program that helped propel Hawthorne Elementary School from an academically low-ranking school to a 2004 California Distinguished School, one of the state's top educational designations.

History senior and aspiring high school teacher Jim Fredette has been involved with the tutoring program for four years. "When the program began five years ago, Hawthorne was the lowest-ranking school



Hawthorne Elementary School student Rhianna Ruiz gets help from aerospace engineering major Mark Egan. (Photo by Tony Hertz)

in the area. On the latest state standardized tests, the school earned a 10, the highest score possible," Fredette says.

And there are other benefits, too. "I love the interaction with the children and am impressed with their progress and willingness to learn."

Fredette is not the only one satisfied with the program. "We really appreciate the after-school club," says Principal Kirt Collins. "The Cal Poly students have made a huge difference in the lives of our children."

In a brand new component of the Honors Program, students are becoming activists, tackling local political issues in the Honors Civic Leadership Program.

The program is designed "to create engaged citizens who will make a difference wherever they go," says Stephan Lamb, director of the university's Community CENTER. "We aim to educate students about the different layers of gov-

ernment, to challenge them to come up with an issue that they are concerned about and try to make a local impact.

"We want the students to find something that they don't agree with and give them the skill set to change it. It can be as simple as saying, 'We need a stop light at that corner,'" Lamb explains.

Although still growing in scope and enrollment, the Honors Program has had a positive impact on those involved.

"The program has been a significant factor to my success as a student and a young professional," says fifth-year architecture major Vivian Ngo. "The Honors House helped my transition from high school to college, and I am grateful for the experiences I gained from the freshman orientation program, challenging honors courses, and volunteer opportunities.

"I believe the Honors Program has helped me develop into a well-rounded individual." ■